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ABSTRACT

The handbook for parents of gifted students in Virginia provides basic State guidelines and lists resources. The state definition of gifted students is given and the six areas of giftedness specifically defined. Typical characteristics of the gifted child are briefly listed. Gifted identification procedures are outlined including referral, screening and assessment, obtaining of parental consent, and determination of eligibility. The identification of gifted students in special populations is also addressed. The purpose and legal background of gifted education in Virginia is summarized. The handbook also examines local school division responsibility for developing a plan for gifted education that addresses the following: philosophy; goals and objectives; identification and placement; program design; personnel selection and staff development; advisory council; and evaluation. Program options for the identified gifted child at both the elementary and secondary levels are listed and include enrichment in the regular classroom, out-of-grade placement in certain subjects, resource room programs, full-time classes, subject acceleration or advancement, honors classes, independent study, mentorships, college courses/dual enrollment, magnet schools, and Governor's School programs. Finally, the role of parents and the Advisory Committee is considered. A directory of resources includes programs, organizations, periodicals, and books. (17 entries) (DB)

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Gifted Education in Virginia Parent Handbook

1990

Virginia Department of Education
Programs for the Gifted
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GIFTED EDUCATION IN VIRGINIA
PARENT HANDBOOK

Fall 1990

Virginia Department of Education
Programs for the Gifted
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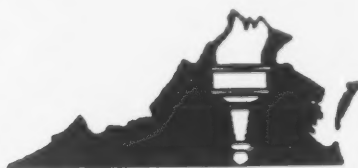


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WHO ARE THE GIFTED?

The state of Virginia defines gifted students as ***"those students in kindergarten through grade 12 whose abilities and potential for accomplishment are so outstanding that they require special programs to meet their educational needs."*** The state further defines giftedness in six areas:

General Intellectual Ability - the child who is smart, learns quickly, knows a lot about many things and, in general, stands out from his age group.

Specific Academic Ability - the student who demonstrates unusual aptitude in a particular area such as mathematics, language arts, science, etc. and needs instruction beyond that of the regular curriculum.

Visual and Performing Arts Ability - the student whose artistic, musical or dramatic talent is so outstanding that a differentiated program is needed.

Practical Arts Ability - the student who excels consistently in developing a product or in performance in a vocational or technical arts program and needs instruction beyond that of the regular curriculum.

Psychosocial Ability - the student whose ability to work with others and to assume leadership roles is so exceptional that special opportunities need to be made available.

Creative and Productive Thinking Ability - the student who is able to manipulate ideas, look at things in a different light, use creative approaches to solving problems and for whom conventional instructional approaches are not always appropriate.

Local school divisions are required to identify and serve students who exhibit potential in one or more of the areas of giftedness as defined above. Many of the youngsters who are identified fit into several categories and the instructional program prescribed should reflect that diversity.

Virginia is one of the few states in the nation to include the practical or technical arts as an area of giftedness to be served. At the state level, Division of Vocational Program Services is developing guidelines and providing assistance to local school divisions to address the needs of the vocationally gifted. A copy of the document *Gifted Students and the Technical Arts* is available from the Department of Education.

AS A PARENT, HOW CAN I TELL IF MY CHILD IS GIFTED?

The stereotype of the serious intellectual "genius" with horn rimmed glasses is indeed a myth. There is no one way to describe a gifted child; they come in all shapes, sizes and personalities. However, gifted children do possess certain characteristics and exhibit behaviors that set them apart from their peers. In general, gifted youngsters reveal their giftedness in one or more of the following ways. They:

- tend to have advanced vocabularies
- are intensely curious
- are interested in many things
- see beyond the obvious
- learn quickly and retain information longer
- sustain interest for long periods of time
- work independently at an early age
- relate well to adults
- tend to learn to read early

In addition to these general characteristics, many gifted children have vivid imaginations and create stories and plays for other children. Some youngsters who tend to look at things in a different way are often the creative problem solvers who come up with unusual solutions to real problems. For others, the leadership potential shows up early as the child "takes charge" in group activities and is given leadership roles in school.

As parents become aware of the differences between their children and other youngsters, they are often embarrassed to say "gifted" in describing their child. However, the reality is that they must deal with the child's special needs and should work to develop and nurture the potential at home and throughout the school years.

The process of identifying gifted children in the schools will usually include one of the several behavioral checklists available. Since parents have the opportunity to observe their child in varying home and social situations, they need to have input into this phase of the screening process. It is particularly important with very young children.

HOW ARE THE GIFTED IDENTIFIED?

The guidelines for setting up the procedures for the identification of gifted youngsters in a local school division are outlined in the state regulations. The process must be consistent with the plan for gifted education submitted to the Department of Education by the school division.

Several factors are to be considered in the process:

- referrals should be accepted on a continuous basis
- measures used to identify youngsters should be appropriate to the age of the child and to the areas of giftedness being considered
- no **one** measure should determine eligibility
- guarantees should be made that special populations (i.e. minority, disadvantaged, handicapped, etc.) will be assessed appropriately

BASIC PROCEDURES FOR IDENTIFYING GIFTED STUDENTS

Referral

Youngsters may be referred or nominated for the gifted program by school-personnel, parent/guardians, other qualified individuals or youngsters may self-nominate.

Screening/Assessment

The process begins with screening which is the rapid review of students to locate a pool of candidates for further evaluation. The assessment process involves gathering pertinent data and/or administering additional tests or measures to determine the eligibility of the child to receive gifted services. Determination may be based on two or more of the following:

- appropriate instruments including rating scales, characteristics checklists, interest inventories and/or questionnaires
- individual or group ability testing
- individual or group achievement testing in specific academic areas
- creativity tests
- previous accomplishments
- student products
- auditions/portfolios

- teacher observations
- measures related to areas of special ability/talent, such as the visual, performing and technical arts
- other valid measures or procedures established by the school division

Parental Consent

Parents are involved in the identification process when they grant permission for additional testing to be done and when they give consent for placement in the program.

Determination of Eligibility

The process of identifying gifted youngsters is carried out by an Identification/Placement Committee appointed by the building principal, or by the superintendent. It is the responsibility of this group to examine all pertinent information and to determine the eligibility of the referred student. Those found eligible will be offered an appropriate educational program.

SPECIAL POPULATIONS

Schools must seek out those youngsters of special circumstances who are not readily identified through the usual procedures. Often because of cultural, class, and/or developmental differences, students from low socioeconomic circumstances, minority students, and handicapped students are excluded from or under represented in gifted programs.

Professionals who work daily with youngsters need to be alert to the "hidden" potential of the special populations. Parents can help by sharing with their child's classroom teacher examples of the child's work and experiences outside the classroom. Parents can help other parents by informing them of the gifted program and of the school's responsibility to provide testing and selection materials that are sensitive to language differences and are neither culturally nor racially discriminatory.

GIFTED EDUCATION IN VIRGINIA

WHY GIFTED EDUCATION?

Within the general school population there are many children whose educational needs are beyond the scope of the regular school program and for whom curricular modifications must be made. Gifted children comprise one such group. Advocates of gifted education have long recognized that the extraordinary abilities and talents of these children require differentiated educational programs if the potential is to be fulfilled. Accepting this premise, the Commonwealth of Virginia has mandated that the local school divisions identify the gifted and develop appropriate program offerings in grades K-12.

LEGAL BACKGROUND

The mandate for gifted education in Virginia originates with the General Assembly's responsibility for public education under the Virginia Constitution. The Board of Education prescribes the **Standards of Quality** under which Virginia's public schools will operate. Standard 5 requires each school division to "conduct a program acceptable to the Board of Education for the early identification of gifted and talented students." In addition, "each school division shall offer differentiated instructional opportunities...for identified gifted and talented students."

The steps to be taken to carry out this charge are outlined in the **Virginia Plan for the Gifted**. This document and the **Regulations Governing the Educational Program for Gifted Students** provide the legal requirements to be followed by local school divisions in designing and implementing gifted programs. It is within this framework that the right of gifted students to appropriate differentiated educational opportunities are guaranteed.

LOCAL SCHOOL DIVISION RESPONSIBILITY

In keeping with the state regulations, each school division is required to develop a plan for gifted education and to submit the plan to the **Virginia Department of Education** for approval. The plan must address the following:

- **PHILOSOPHY**
a statement of the school system's beliefs about education of the gifted
- **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**
what the school system plans to accomplish and how it will be completed.

- **IDENTIFICATION AND PLACEMENT**
how the gifted child will be identified and placed in appropriate programs
- **PROGRAM DESIGN**
how appropriate instruction will be offered and how the curriculum will be modified to meet the needs of the gifted student
- **PERSONNEL SELECTION AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT**
who will teach the gifted child and how they will be trained
- **ADVISORY COUNCIL**
how parents and the community will be involved in developing programs for gifted students
- **EVALUATION**
how program effectiveness will be measured

FUNDING

Local school divisions are allocated state funds to supplement local expenditures for gifted education. The General Assembly determines the amount of funding for each locality and Virginia Department of Education provides guidelines for the use of these funds. Parents and educators should work together to determine the most appropriate use of funds for a local school division.

MY CHILD IS GIFTED, NOW WHAT?

Of major importance in identifying a student as gifted is determining the best instructional program for that student. Placement options must be matched with the identified area of giftedness and should reflect a differentiated approach to instruction.

The delivery of services to gifted students will include a wide range of options: curricular modifications; special curricular offerings, and extracurricular activities. A good educational plan for a gifted youngster might also include course offerings not limited to gifted students, or a special activity open to other students with similar interests. Parents should ask themselves:

- is the program meeting my child's individual need?
- is the content/instruction such that my child is challenged intellectually?
- is the teacher knowledgeable about gifted education?
- does the teacher provide for different abilities within the class/group?
- does this class/activity/program fit into the long range educational goals set for my child?

PROGRAM OPTIONS

A wide variety of program possibilities exist across the Commonwealth and the nation. Local school divisions have established programs based on identified student needs, physical plant arrangements, staffing, local resources and other instructional and financial considerations. In all instances teachers trained to work with gifted students should be involved.

ELEMENTARY program options may include the following:

Enrichment in the regular classroom offering content that is broader in concept, deeper in understanding and relevant to the student's needs and abilities.

Cluster grouping of gifted students within the regular classroom.

Out of grade placement for certain subjects, such as reading, mathematics, or language arts.

Resource rooms for small group instruction in reading, mathematics, or other content.

Pull-out classes with special areas of emphasis for students with similar interests or abilities.

Full-time classes for gifted students.

Schools for the gifted serving students from several local schools.

Saturday morning and summer programs offered by the local school, the school division or area institutions.

Regional Governor's School Programs offered at various locations and funded with state money.

Additional Activities that may include but are not limited to the following:

- Junior Great Books Program
- Future Problem Solving Program
- Odyssey of the Mind Creative Competition
- Academic Knowledge Master
- INVENT America!

SECONDARY—MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL options may include the following:

Subject acceleration or advancement through a sequence of offerings in a content area such as mathematics or science.

Honors classes providing differentiation of content and instructional strategies.

Advanced Placement courses that follow the prescribed AP program and allow students to earn college credit through testing.

Independent study under the direction of a qualified instructor.

Correspondence courses as approved by the school division.

Mentorships providing students with the opportunity to explore career options within the framework of a planned program.

Seminars/Special Projects including interdisciplinary studies and special interest groups.

Electronic Classroom offerings of higher level academic courses made accessible to students throughout the state.

College courses/dual enrollment as outlined in the *Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia*.

Magnet schools within a school division addressing specific areas of instruction.

Special offerings before school, after school, Saturday morning, and in the summer.

Regional Governor's School Programs funded by the state and participating school divisions.

Summer Residential Governor's School Programs conducted in several locations within the state and open to students selected through a nomination and screening process.

Additional Activities that may include but are not limited to the following:

- Future Problem Solving Program
- Odyssey of the Mind Creative Competition
- Academic Knowledge Master
- Foreign Language Competitions
- Junior Academy of Science
- Mathematics Competitions
- International Baccalaureate Program
- Local programs sponsored by community groups, colleges, universities or other area institutions

The local school division's plan for gifted education contains the various program options available to gifted students formally identified in one or more of the six areas of giftedness. Parents should become familiar with the program modifications available in the local school division. While resources may differ from locality to locality, parents can encourage the development of appropriate programming through involvement with the local advisory committee or local support groups. Local gifted plans are public information and should be available in each school and in the main administration office.

AS A PARENT, WHAT CAN I DO?

For the individual child

From the time your child enters school, parents should be advocates for the child's instructional program. This means taking the approach that parent and school will be working cooperatively to ensure that planned instructional modifications and differentiated curriculum will meet the child's needs. The parent's attitude should be one of positive confidence that the local school can provide such a program.

As a Parent You Should:

- learn all you can about giftedness
- be familiar with the school division's policy guidelines and procedures on gifted education
- be knowledgeable about the types of services available

- get to know your child's teacher(s)
- meet with the teacher to discuss the program and to find out what special provisions will be made to meet your child's special needs
- insist that specific instructional goals and objectives be set, with a means of evaluation.
- examine your child's records to be sure that pertinent information is used in setting the instructional goals (standardized reading/mathematics scores, progress reports from the previous years, etc.)
- be reasonable in your demands, but firm in your expectations

If you feel that your child is not being properly stimulated and challenged, and your efforts to improve the situation are unsuccessful at the school level, contact the division administrator of gifted programs who has the responsibility for implementing the school division's plan.

For Gifted Education

Parents can be catalysts for change and can bring about the development of high level programming for gifted youngsters. To accomplish this, parents need to be positive and supportive of the schools while, at the same time, they are firm in their demands for quality education. Advocate for the good of all children, and support those issues that foster excellence

As A Parent You Should:

- become familiar with, and maintain contact with, the local gifted advisory committee
- gather information on giftedness, instructional options, programs in operation, etc.
- attend school board meetings
- be familiar with state regulations and local school division policy
- organize or join support groups
- generate community support
- monitor legislative action

School board members, supervisors/city council members and state legislators listen to parents. Well-organized responsible parent support groups can affect gifted education on the local, state and national levels. Your active support and involvement in organizations and programs for gifted children is important and can make a difference.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE?

Advisory committees provide a means for parents and community members to have input into gifted education, both statewide and on the local level.

STATE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The State Advisory Committee is composed of representatives from each of the following groups: the superintendent's region, gifted support groups, parents, professional educators, and business/community members. The group meets on a regular basis to monitor the progress of gifted programs statewide, to review suggestions, to receive input from various advocacy groups, to review legislative matters and to develop recommendations to be made to the State Board of Education.

LOCAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

At the local level, each school division is required to have an advisory committee that represents teachers, administrators, and the community. The group may include students as well. The makeup of the committee should reflect the various school levels and populations, and the geographic, and socio-economic diversity of the community.

One committee function is to ensure that parents and other members of the community are kept informed about gifted education in their locality. It is important that parents know who represents their school on the committee. Parents should contact the local gifted program coordinator/administrator for the names of their local advisory committee representatives.

Building an effective advisory committee benefits the child and the school. Because advisory committees exist to monitor programs and are often catalysts for change, you are encouraged to become involve as a positive advocate of programs for the gifted. Specific guidelines for building an effective advisory committee are available from the gifted program administrator in your locality.

DIRECTORY OF RESOURCES

Successful parenting is the result of knowing how to address a child's needs at each stage of development and to monitor the child's social, emotional and educational experiences. Parents of gifted children need the support of others as they face the added challenge that giftedness provides. Books, magazines and local, state and national organizations can help parents become more knowledgeable and confident in coping with their child's giftedness.

PROGRAMS FOR THE GIFTED

For information about statewide programs, state guidelines and regulations, local contact people, and special resources, etc. contact:

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Office of Programs for the Gifted

P.O. Box 6Q

Richmond, VA 23216

Telephone (804) 225-2070

ORGANIZATIONS

Local/Regional:

There are several local and regional organizations serving specific areas of the state. Many of these groups sponsor workshops and other activities of interest to parents and students. Contact your local administrator of gifted programs for information.

State:

VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION FOR EDUCATION OF THE GIFTED (VAEG)

An organization made up of educators, parents and others interested in promoting gifted education. VAEG publishes a newsletter and sponsors a statewide conference every other year. For information, contact your local administrator of gifted programs or the Department of Education.

National:

ASSOCIATION FOR THE GIFTED COUNCIL FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

1920 Association Drive

Reston, Virginia 22091

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR GIFTED CHILDREN

4175 Lovell Road
Circle Pines, Minnesota 55014

GIFTED CHILD SOCIETY

190 Rock Road
Glen Rock, New Jersey

These national organizations, while directed toward professionals in the field of gifted education, do sponsor conferences and distribute publications which may be of interest to parents.

PUBLICATIONS

The Gifted Child TODAY is an interesting and informative magazine for teachers and parents. It provides ideas for working with youngsters, and information on resources available and highlights a special area of giftedness in each issue.

P.O. Box 637
100 Pine Avenue
Holmes, PA 19043

GIFTED CHILDREN MONTHLY is written for parents and has a special section for children. Each issue includes up-to-date coverage of what is happening in gifted education. The magazine is published 11 times a year.

P. O. Box 10149
Des Moines, IA 50340

CHALLENGE is a magazine aimed at teachers, but contains a number of ideas for activities that parents can use with youngsters at home. The magazine is published 5 times a year.

Box 299
Carthage, IL 62321

BOOKS

There are many excellent books dealing with giftedness; some very general and others directed at specific areas of giftedness. The books listed below may provide a starting point for those parents interested in learning more about the nature of giftedness.

BRINGING OUT THE BEST by Jacquelyn Saunders focuses on the very young child, two to seven. This is an excellent resource guide for parents. Suggestions and strategies are given for home, day care and school situations.

Free Spirit Publishing
4904 Zenith Ave. S
Minneapolis, MN 55410

GROWING UP GIFTED by Barbara Clark is written from the perspective of a gifted person, the book provides insight into the nature of giftedness and the social, emotional and educational considerations.

Charles E. Merrill
1300 Alum Creek Dr.
Columbus, OH 43216

PARENTS' GUIDE TO RAISING A GIFTED CHILD: RECOGNIZING AN DEVELOPING YOUR CHILD'S POTENTIAL by James Alvino and the editors of **Gifted Children Monthly** is written for parents rather than professionals, the book offers sound practical advice on nurturing the gifted youngster.

Little, Brown and Co.
34 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02106

PT/PARTNERS by Merle B. Karnes contains ideas for a working relationship between parents and teachers of gifted children. From the identification process through parent advocacy approaches, the book provides practical helps for achieving home school cooperation. Also available is **PT/GT**, a resource book of activities that can be carried out at home.

American Guidance Service
Circle Pines, MN 55014

PARENTING THE GIFTED: DEVELOPING THE PROMISE, co-authored by Sheila and Joseph Perino, explores the meaning of "gifted," and focuses more on the young gifted child than most publications.

R. R. Bowker Co.
New York, NY 10036

THE UNDERSERVED: OUR YOUNG GIFTED CHILDREN by Merle Karnes is of particular interest to parents of young gifted children. The focus is on the need for early identification and development of potential.

Council for Exceptional Children
Reston, VA 22091

The following books are written for gifted young people and focus on critical issues and problems encountered by students. Most of them are available through the gifted program in the schools.

THE GIFTED KIDS SURVIVAL GUIDE (Ages 10 and under) by Judy Galbraith and **THE GIFTED KIDS SURVIVAL GUIDE II (Ages 11 - 18)** by James Delisle and Judy Galbraith explore the problems and frustrations of being gifted and offer tips for dealing with these problems.

Free Spirit Publishing
Minneapolis, MN 55410

GET OFF MY BRAIN by Randall McCutcheon with a foreword by Steve Allen and subtitled *A Survival Guide for Lazy Students*, takes a witty approach to helping gifted high school and college students learn workable strategies for coping.

Free Spirit Publishing
Minneapolis, MN 55410

PERFECTIONISM by Miriam Adderholt-Elliott focuses on an important issue facing many gifted young people. The book explores the nature of "perfectionism" and offers sound advice in dealing with the external pressure as well as that from within.

Free Spirit Publishing
Minneapolis, MN 55410



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